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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SOCIOECONOMIC SURVEY OF USINT APPLICANTS

Classified By: COM: Michael E. Parmly: For reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Post conducted an informal socioeconomic survey of USINT applicants for visa and refugee status during the first five months of 2008. The sample was composed of 1,320 Cubans, one-third of whom completed the survey before the February 24 handover of power to Raul Castro and two-thirds after that date. Although this survey is not statistically significant given the total population of Cuba and other parameters that are unavoidably biased, analysis of the results nevertheless provides interesting information about the many Cubans who have contact with USINT, and their opinions about economic conditions and attitudes towards the current regime. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Of the total number of respondents, about 30% were applicants seeking refugee status, while the remainder were applying for immigrant or non-immigrant visas, or one of several parole programs that exist for Cuban nationals. Analysis of the survey results sought to compare and contrast the responses of each group -- hereinafter, Refugee and Consular -- in order to draw conclusions about the differences in each group's overall economic condition and views toward the GOC. In addition, an effort was made to distinguish variations between two periods: before and after the February 24 handover of power -- pre- or post-Raul Castro.

13. (SBU) The majority of survey respondents in both periods were in the 35-60 age group. Roughly half of the Consular respondents were from Havana, whereas only a third of Refugee respondents were from Havana. The rest came from other provinces. Slightly more than 25% of Refugee respondents were unemployed vs. only 7% of Consular. While this is a potentially important difference, it is important to note that one of the criteria for qualifying as a refugee is the inability to find gainful employment.

14. (SBU) More Refugee respondents were self-employed (20%) than Consular (11%). Roughly between 15-25% of respondents worked for state companies.

15. (SBU) Overwhelmingly, more Consular respondents received remittances by a factor slightly greater than 2 to 1. Given that the majority of Consular respondents have at least one family member in the U.S., it would make sense that a greater number report receiving remittances.

16. (SBU) Of those who receive remittances, Consular

respondents reported receiving greater quantities than Refugee respondents. 53% of Consular respondents received more than USD 50 per month vs. only 21% of Refugee respondents. Most Refugee respondents (79%) received under USD 50. Only 5% of Consular and 4% of the Refugee respondents received more than USD 100 per month.

¶17. (SBU) In both categories and during both periods, more than 80% of the survey sample declared that current salaries and/or pensions are not sufficient to cover basic needs. Refugee respondents declared this to be true in slightly greater proportions (96% vs 89%). This slight difference could be explained by the greater number of Consular respondents who reported receiving remittance income, which could make them feel like they have enough money to cover basic needs, even if it is not actually coming from their state salaries.

¶18. (SBU) While the discrepancy is more pronounced in the second period than in the first, more Consular respondents stated their main sources of income were salaries/pensions (24% Consular vs. 14% Refugee) or remittances (50% Consular vs. 23% Refugee). On average, more than half of Refugee respondents reported their main source of income was self-employment, which could involve activities ranging from renting rooms to selling goods on the black market.

¶19. (SBU) Consular respondents reported spending 17% more monthly of their national Cuban pesos (CUP) than their Refugee counterparts. The difference in monthly expenditure became more dramatic when respondents were asked their hard currency (CUC) expenditures. Consular respondents spent

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between about 50% more CUC than Refugee respondents. In contrast, two-thirds of Refugee respondents spent less than 50 CUC per month. This difference could be explained by the fact that more Consular respondents reported receiving remittances.

¶10. (SBU) For more than 90% of respondents in both categories, including more than 99% of Refugee respondents, the ration card does not cover basic needs. These results clearly point in one direction and cannot be explained away easily by the response bias mentioned above. Consular respondents reported making complementary purchases at hard currency (CUC) stores more than Refugee respondents (58% vs. 19%). More Refugee respondents, however, reported making complementary purchases at agricultural (CUP) markets (70% vs. 59%).

¶11. (SBU) The rate of vehicle ownership is low for both categories, with Consular respondents reporting a slightly higher rate of ownership (19% vs. 6%). The likely explanation for a higher rate of vehicle ownership among Consular respondents has to do with their ability to use remittances and other sources of income that Refugee respondents cannot access to purchase and maintain a vehicle.

¶12. (SBU) When asked for their opinions about the education system, only 22% of Consular and 4% of Refugee respondents stated that the system has improved. About 41% of Consular and 33% of Refugee respondents answered that the system has remained the same, and a total of 36% (Consular) and 62% (Refugee) of respondents expressed the view that the system has deteriorated.

¶13. (SBU) An even lower percentage of respondents --13% of Consular and slightly over 1% of Refugee -- stated that the medical system has improved. About 40% of Consular and 20% of Refugee respondents answered that the medical system had stayed the same, and nearly 48% of Consular and 77% of Refugee respondents thought the medical system had deteriorated.

¶14. (SBU) In response to a question regarding the overall economic situation, the majority of respondents in both categories stated that it has deteriorated (54% of Consular and 82% of Refugee). Notably, only 0.2% of Refugee respondents reported that the economic situation has improved, whereas about 7% of Consular respondents thought the situation has improved.

¶15. (SBU) Asked for their opinion on the impact of government measures on the standard of living, the overwhelming majority of respondents in both categories (75% of Consular and over 99% of Refugee) thought living standards in Cuba will not improve.

¶16. (SBU) Comment: There are several biases inherent in our sample group that unavoidably skew any conclusions to the point of rendering them statistically worthless. For example: Almost every respondent is seeking to visit or emigrate to the U.S.; some respondents who thought their survey results might somehow be traced back to them may have provided inaccurate information in order to not prejudice their applications; likewise, in order to advantage their applications, some respondents could have provided answers they may have thought would "please" USINT staff. Consequently, we should be cautious in making any generalizations about the Cuban population based on this sub-set. Nevertheless, this survey provides an educational window into the makeup of USINT's biggest customer base, and offers insights into the broader Cuban population.
PARMLY